Trends in EHS and Sustainability to Watch in 2026

Research-Based

Environmental, Health, Safety (EHS) and Sustainability is being reshaped in 2026 by fragmented regulatory expansion, AI adoption, more integrated risk management, and shifting workforce expectations. Organizations continue to move from compliance-only mindsets to continuous, tech-enabled prevention.

1. EHS leaders are becoming integrators

The EHS leadership evolution is driving demand for augmentation, not outsourcing. Organizations broadly intend to retain EHS and OEHS capabilities in-house while selectively using external support to build new capabilities, implement complex systems, address analytics gaps, and support assurance readiness.

Leadership roles increasingly span safety, sustainability, data governance, and enterprise risk. EHS leaders are becoming integrators as the role now connects safety, operational sustainability, resilience and data strategy.

2. Sustainability more closely aligned with Business Value

Sustainability/ESG execution is shifting from narrative reporting to operational performance management. Across industries, sustainability is increasingly framed as execution rather than disclosure. Emphasis is shifting toward traceable, defensible, and decision-useful data for emissions, energy, resources, and supplier performance.

3. AI-Enabled Continuous Risk Management

Artificial intelligence and technology are increasingly used for real-time data tracking, hazard detection, emissions modeling, and compliance reporting, moving EHS&S from manual processes to automated insights.

EHS programs are shifting from periodic audits to real-time hazard detection using sensors, analytics, and workflow automation. Additionally, AI-powered computer vision systems analyze video feeds to continuously monitor workplace environments, automatically identifying safety violations (like missing PPE or unsafe behaviors), ergonomic risks, exclusion zone breaches, and other hazards, enabling immediate alerts, proactive interventions, and data-driven safety improvements beyond what traditional manual observations can detect.

4. A Fragmented Regulatory Environment

Regulatory and compliance shifts:

- Tighter rules on climate and chemicals (e.g., greenhouse gas reporting, PFAS, TSCA updates, EPCRA) are raising expectations for environmental reporting and risk management.
- New or strengthened standards around heat stress, workplace violence, and other high hazard areas (falls, warehousing, hazardous machinery) are becoming priority enforcement topics.
- Companies are building more proactive compliance programs to manage shifting OSHA/EPA agendas, regional rules, and climate risk disclosure requirements
- Globally, regulation is fragmenting across the U.S., Europe, Latin America, and Asia Pacific, driving material changes to EHS expectations. Regulatory scope is redefining workplace risk management, sustainability accountability (CSRD), and cross-border environmental responsibility (EPR).
- Global harmonization is increasing, with extended producer responsibility (EPR) and packaging rules taking effect in the EU and APAC starting in 2026.

5. Evolving Workplace Safety Risks

Workplace risk profiles are changing due to automation, digitalization, and hybrid work, introducing new hazard types alongside traditional safety risks.

Prevention and preparedness now define safety leadership, with growing expectations for organizations to proactively manage high-consequence risks. The focus is shifting from SIFs to PSIFs (Potential Serious Injury and Fatality).

6. Well-being is becoming core to EHS Strategy

Mental health is a priority for roughly one-third of organizations, with European companies significantly more likely to provide mental health programs than their North American counterparts. There is increasing recognition that burnout, fatigue, and psychological safety directly influence serious injury risk. Countries such as Brazil and Spain will require psychosocial risk assessments beginning in 2026.

7. Workforce Transformation & Culture Challenges

Gaps are widening between expectations and capacity. Organizations are placing greater demands on EHS teams—spanning safety, sustainability, data governance, climate risk, and reporting—without proportional increases in staffing, skills, or time, limiting what teams can realistically deliver.

EHS roles are becoming more complex and multidisciplinary. Modern EHS professionals are expected to combine technical expertise with data literacy, change management, and cross-functional influence, increasing pressure on already constrained teams.

This product is based on a comprehensive search of published articles and research. In recognition, the following are the original sources of the material:

AIHA (American Industrial Hygiene Association)

- Future of OEHS 2025: Survey Results
- AIHA Publishes Future of OEHS Survey Results: Hiring Trends and Academic Needs

Benchmark Gensuite

- 2025 EHS Benchmarking Report (AI for proactive safety, metric effectiveness, leadership scope expansion)
- Benchmark Gensuite Named a Leader in 2025 Green Quadrant for EHS Software

Campbell Institute (National Safety Council)

- Exploring the Role of Generative AI in Occupational Environment, Health and Safety
- Leading Indicators: Guidance and Frameworks

Cority

- The Future of AI-Enabled EHS Software Solutions

Enablon (Wolters Kluwer)

- Integrated EHS, ESG, and Operational Risk Management Platform Overview

ERM (Environmental Resources Management)

- EHS and Sustainability Strategy: EHS as a Strategic Risk Function
- Decarbonization and Climate Execution Insights
- Sustainability Reporting, Disclosure, and Assurance Perspectives

National Safety Council (NSC)

- Work to Zero Initiative
- Work to Zero: Safety Technology Report
- Safety Technology Adoption and Barriers

Verdantix

- Insights on Carbon Management, Sustainability Software, and ESG Data Governance
- Green Quadrant: EHS Software 2025 (AI differentiation and platform convergence)
- Market Consolidation and AI-Driven Shift Toward Proactive Risk Management